

MELVIN WILBUR

Life and Trials of an Early Latter-day Saint

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Our first ancestor to embrace the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Latter-days was Melvin WILBUR. He paid a dear price for his new found faith, giving up family and friends to follow the Prophet Joseph Smith, leaving a trail of graves along his path to Zion. This is his story.

Melvin was born 10 Aug 1801 at Bridgewater, Massachusetts, the second son of Lemuel WILBUR and Jane Leach. Melvin was descended from sturdy immigrant stock. On his paternal side were early American merchants and one who operated the first iron foundry in America. On his mother's side, were many Mayflower pilgrims such as Governor Winslow, the Royal Governor of Plymouth, and Mary Chilton, the first white child to step ashore at Plymouth Rock, Francis Cook, Experience Mitchell and Robert Latham.

Melvin lived his early life in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. On the 15 Feb 1824 he married Eunice Dennis. She was 4th child of Major Dennis and Eunice King of Tiverton, Newport, Rhode Island. Eunice was born 22 Jan 1808.

Melvin Wilbur's life equaled the courage of his early pilgrim ancestors. He loved the Bible and sought for years a religion that would allow him to worship God according to his studious interpretation of the Bible.

Melvin and Eunice lived in Providence Rhode Island for the births of their first three children. Eliza J. was born 20 Mar 1825, Melvin L. 2 Sep 1828 and Stephen King 2 Jul 1832.

The year, 1832 was very eventful for the WILBUR family and all their posterity. Elders Orson Hyde and Samuel H. Smith, brother of the Prophet Joseph, visited the state of Rhode Island as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They arrived at Providence on the 13th of July, 1832 and "*found a few believing friends.*" Since Melvin was baptized in July 1832 by Orson Hyde, we have reason to believe he was one of those believing friends.

Elder Samuel H. Smith relates their entry into Rhode Island and the subsequent events of that day as follows: [Journey of an 1830s Book of Mormon by Gerald E. Jones]

13th. [July 1832] Left Dorchester and went on towards Providence. Traveled a part of the way and then got into the stage and rode into Providence. Stopped to the house of one Miss Hawkins. Some of the people were believing. They had heard Sister Viena tell concerning the Book. Some of them came in the same evening and we taught them.

Orson Hyde's account adds other details for the same date:

Left Mr. Cramer's for Providence, R.I.; traveled on foot 20 miles, and then got into the Stage and rode into Providence 20 miles further. Called on a Mr. Love; found his wife believing so we found friends and the Lord opened the way before us.

The missionaries held meetings during the evenings of 14-16 July. Elder Hyde alone records the difficulties with a rabble on the last night:

"They were of the baser sort, but the Lord enabled me to speak the word with boldness and confidence, and I told them about it; and as soon as meeting was out they set up a cry and uproar, and they were determined to tar and feather us. But as kind heaven would have it one man, a friend, heard the collection, and came to us and told us to be off, for mischief was devised against us. Accordingly we passed off in the crowd unmolested and they lost their prey. "

Both men gave an account of the next day's events. Elder Smith recorded more names in his account, which follows.

"17th. Visited some of those that were believing and we concluded to meet with a few that believed, that we might comfort one another and that we might teach them more and to know how many were ready to go forward in baptism and to conclude upon the time and place of baptism. ...We were going to have a meeting at Mr. Wilber's and their gathered around the house a great multitude [mob] and many crowded into the house and Mr. Wilbur told them that we were not there and many of those that were outdoors would not believe and they threatened that they would search the house and find us and tar and feather us...two young women came and told us there was a considerable number gathered around the house where we were and declared that if we were in the house that they would have us, but the people of the house did not let them in and told them there was no meeting there. The street was full and those that saw them said they thought there was a hundred people in the road, but we kept still that we did not talk to be heard, thus were we undisturbed. None of those that were believing concluded to obey by going forward in baptism save one **Mr. Wilbur concluded to go forward in baptism.**"

Only Elder Hyde recounted the trouble that he and Elder Smith encountered following a baptism the next morning, and only Elder Smith recorded the person's name as well as the name of another convert who was baptized later that day. Elder Hyde wrote:

"July 18th, 1832: Baptized one in the morning early before the mob and people got to stirring much, but on our return from the water a part of the mob met us in the street, and one of them presented me with a paper containing 4 sheet iron plates with rings through the back in the form of a D with hieroglyphics marked on them with chalk. Many were busy laying plans to take us when it came night; and I told Samuel that we would get out of this City as soon as possible. Accordingly we left the City after baptizing one more and

confirmed them at the water's edge."

Elder Smith's account fills in needed details, including the identification of Melvin Wilbur:

"18th. Early the next morning he [**Melvin Wilbur**] came down to be baptized and we went with him away into a by place and baptized him and then we went back to Sister Hawkins. Brother Wilber went home and we ate breakfast and then went to Brother Wilber's. His wife was very much opposed or unbelieving. Found fault with him for being baptized so soon and not telling the people and his family of it. We reasoned with her and also with others and Brother Wilber got George Miller and went to the water. We went to Sister Hawkins and got our clothes and went to the same place where we baptized in the morning and Brother Wilber and George Miller came and met us and there we baptized George Miller and confirmed him by the laying on of hands.

"Brother Wilber had an infirmity for a long time and we laid our hands on him and told him that his infirmity should be healed according to his faith, having great faith that he would get entirely well and Brother Miller had a lame leg and we laid our hands upon his leg also. They accompanied us a short distance and we left them and went about five miles to Wm. Angel's, whose wife was a sister of Sister Viena Lacways.

On 20 July both elders recorded the fact that they ordained Melvin Wilbur an elder. Elder Hyde added that they "gave him a license to preach the Gospel" and that they "tarried all night with Virena's at Fox Point Wharf in the City." Two days later they conducted a public meeting in which the newly ordained Elder Wilbur spoke, thereby gaining Elder Hyde's approval.

In summary, It was on July 14, 1832 the above mentioned missionaries held their first meeting in Providence, Rhode Island in a private house. They then continued house to house visits and held several other meetings during the days that followed. On the evening of the 17th, when the brethren were making preparations to hold a meeting in a private house (The Wilbur home); a mob consisting of about 100 men, gathered on the streets and repaired to a house where the brethren had formerly paid a visit, swearing they would tar and feather the "Mormons".

Failing to find the missionaries in that house, they next came to the place (Melvin Wilbur home) where the elders were preparing for the meeting. A young woman, however, ran ahead of the mob and told the brethren of the pending danger. They had no time to get away for the mob was upon them. A young boy entered the building, but could not find the brethren, who had hidden themselves, so he went out and told the mob they were not there. The mob dispersed swearing, cursing and threatening future violence. The following day, July 18, early in the morning, the missionaries baptized their first convert in Providence. This source conflicts by four days the date we previously had of Melvin's baptism. It is possible that Melvin was converted on the meeting held the 14th of July and not baptized until the 18th. (Since the journals are primary evidence, the 18th is the best evidenced date we have for his baptism.)

Although Eunice was at first unbelieving, that did not last long. Likely when the missionaries reasoned with her, a testimony began to take root. As for Eunice's baptismal date, her TIB [Temple Index Bureau card] gives the year 1840. However, she received her patriarchal blessing in 1836 at Kirtland, Ohio under the hands of Joseph Smith Sr. along with her husband, Melvin. (They had a son born before 1837 whom they named Oliver--possibly after Oliver Cowdery.) The 1840 date is probably a re-baptism --which was a common practice of re-dedication among the early Saints.

Eunice had a newborn baby at the time the missionaries converted her husband, so it is quite probable that her condition prevented her baptism at that time. She was certainly valiant in following the Prophet whether or not she was baptized in 1832. Melvin and Eunice were the only known members of their respective families who joined this new sect. There were many hard feelings toward the Mormons and it is possible that some of the members of the mob were Eunice and Melvin's own family.

In Dec 1834, Oliver Cowdery , who was in Kirtland, Ohio at the time, reported:

A communication from D. Nelson & **M. [Melvin] Wilber**, dated Providence, R.I. Nov. 13th informs us, not of a great increase of members to the church, but an anxious request for the elders to call, should they be passing. They say some are looking on to see the accomplishment of God's work, while others mock and despise. So it was in ancient time, and we have nothing less to expect now.

The Saints who were converted to the gospel were urged to gather to Kirtland, Ohio, which had quickly become the headquarters of the new Church. Melvin and Eunice left their home and loved ones in Rhode Island; took their own little family and went to Kirtland.

The building of the temple in Kirtland was the focus of the Saints. They were quite poor, yet to make the temple more beautiful, Eunice and the other women took their beautiful china dishes to the workmen, who crushed them, adding the glass to the outside mortar to create a sparkle about the walls of the temple.

On 3 April 1836, the Kirtland Temple was dedicated as a House of the Lord. This was the first temple built by the Latter-day Saints. Melvin and Eunice Wilbur was probably in attendance at the dedication and witnessed some of the marvelous manifestations surrounding the dedication of the temple. Recalling the events that transpired during the period of the temple's dedication, Orson Pratt declared:

God was there, his angels were there, the Holy Ghost was in the midst of the people, the visions of the Almighty were opened to the minds of many; they saw the heaven's opened; they beheld the angels of God; they heard the voice of the Lord; and they were filled from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet with the power and inspiration of the Holy Ghost...In that Temple, set apart by the servants of God, and dedicated by a prayer that was written by inspiration, the people were blessed as they never had been blessed

for generations and generations."

Melvin WILBUR's name is on a list of the names of Ministers of the Gospel belonging to the church of the Latter Day Saints, whose licenses were recorded, the last quarter of 1836, in the License Records, in Kirtland, Ohio. Following are transcripts of the Patriarchal blessings given to Melvin and Eunice by Joseph Smith Sr. in 1836:

Blessing of Melvin Wilber who was born in Bridgewater, Plymouth county, Massachusetts A.D. 1801:

"Brother WILBUR, In the name of Jesus Christ I lay my hands upon thy head and seal a father's blessing upon thee and upon thy posterity to all generations. Thou art of the seed of Ephraim and hast been blessed for thou art of the first fruits of thy country. Thou art not forsaken for the Lord will bless thee with all the powers of this priesthood. Thou shalt open thy mouth and speak as with the voice of an arch angel, yea thou shalt go forth as a special witness of the Lord, for thou shalt be numbered among the Seventies and any arm or tongue raised against thee shall not prosper. Thou shalt stand until the Savior come, Thou shalt be bound and cast into prison, yet the Lord will deliver thee, and many of that people shall come to thee for baptism and thou shalt rejoice over them. Thou art sealed unto eternal live in the name of Jesus, even so, Amen."

Also the blessing of Eunice WILBUR, who was born in Tiverton, Bristol County, Rhode Island A.D. 1808:

"Sister WILBUR, In the name of Jesus Christ I lay my hands upon thee and seal a father's blessing upon thee in common with thy husband and I say dismiss thy fears, for thy desires have reached unto heaven, and the Lord will answer thy prayers. Thou hast had fears, but have them no more for thy name is written in heaven, thy Redeemer lives and angels rejoice over thee. Thou art chosen of the Lord and shall become a teacher of the daughters of the Lamanites and shall be called a mother in Israel. Thou shalt live to see the third generation of thy posterity, and not long hence angels shall minister unto thee, and thou shalt behold the heavens open and see the glory of God descend upon Zion. Thou shalt live until the Savior shall come and shall be caught up to meet him in the clouds and rejoice with the angels of glory. If faithful, these are thy blessings, and I seal thee up unto eternal live, in the name of the Lord, Amen."

All was not wonderful for the people living in Kirtland. There were many opposing forces and much apostasy within the church. In 1837 the price of land in Kirtland increased by 800%. The Saints were forced to borrow money to purchase homes. The Church entered an unsuccessful venture with trying to form their own bank. When Brigham Young described the conditions existing in Kirtland on Dec 22, 1837, the day of his departure from that community, he said that he fled for his life because of the fury of the mob. It was an 800-mile journey to Missouri where the Saints agreed to gather. Throughout the spring and early summer of 1838, small groups of Mormons left Kirtland for the western frontier. While some enjoyed the luxury of water

transportation, most walked or traveled in wagons.

Melvin and his family remained stalwart. The trials they experienced only strengthened that testimony. There were mobbings on a daily basis in the latter part of 1837. They did not escape the wrath of the mobs, and were forced to leave Kirtland with a newborn baby daughter, Phebe, who is my ancestor, her four brothers and one sister. Eliza, their oldest child was only 13 years of age. Two of the little boys died during or immediately after their Kirtland experience. We do not know how Melvin and Eunice traveled to Missouri, but it appears they came by steamboat when they left Missouri--at least part of the way--from the Redress Petitions following:

In the book, Mormon Redress Petitions, pg. 375-76, we read of their tragic experiences as Melvin itemized the expenses incurred that he, along with many other saints, were petitioning for redress:

The State of Missouri [owes] to Melvin Wilbur:

Mar 1	Moving to Wellsville 90 miles @	\$ 10.00
	lost time 3 days	3.00
	to provisions	1.75
	to passage on Steamboat to St. Louis	22.50
Apr 4	to lost time from Wellsville to Richmond	
	Landen 22 days	22.00
	to passage on steamboat up the MO	20.00
	to moving from Richmond Landen to Far West	6.00
	to 50 bushels of corn (destroyed).25 per bu	12.50
Nov. 10	to lost time from surrender to Apr 27	
	@ \$1 per day	208.00
	To one broad sword	6.00
	to moving from Far West to Quincy	30.00
	Total	314.25

Following are Melvin's own words describing this experience:

"Suffered shameful abuse on board the steamer Aslord by some of the crew. Suffered with sickness in my family. I suppose on the account of fatigue and when sick was threatened of being mobbed, driven out of the house before the surrender when sick with the ague. My wife was scared into fits and how much fatigue we suffered in our way and another I cannot tell. I certify the above to be a correct according to the best of my knowledge."

6 May 1839 Quincy, Illinois

Melvin Wilbor

Sworn to before C.M. Woods, C.C.C. Adams Co., IL

It strikes the tender feelings of our hearts to think of the winter of 1838/1839 – from November 10 until they were safely arrived at Quincy, Illinois on April 27 – 208 days of suffering! It was certainly not an easy journey—forced from the state of Missouri after Governor Boggs issued an extermination order declaring Mormons as enemies of the State—chased by armed mobs who destroyed crops, homes, threatened the lives of the already sick Saints— going to Illinois to seek refuge from the mobs. Many factors contributed to their suffering.

They perspired by day, slept on cold damp ground at night, forded streams, climbed up and down inclines and followed rutted roads and trails, continually weakened by cold, fatigue, hunger, fear, and polluted water.

They buried their little son, Oliver in Missouri in July 1838 (likely at Far West) and their eldest son, Melvin never did recover from the fatigues and sicknesses of the journey. On the 17 Oct 1839 at Quincy, Melvin L. Wilbur (age 11 yr. 1 mo, 15 days) died. Losing their third son in so short a time was a very painful experience for Eunice and Melvin. The fact that he was the eldest son was especially difficult. Three of their six children survived the terrible cholera: Eliza age 14, Stephen age 7, and Phoebe age 2.

The Wilbur's settled in Quincy, Illinois on the banks of the Mississippi River near Nauvoo. The citizens of Quincy were kind to the Saints and as much as possible relieved their want and possible starvation in the cold winter of 1838-39.

The Melvin Wilbur family is listed on the 1840 Census of Quincy, Adams, Illinois in 1840 with these 3 children.

Sometime in 1840, at Quincy, Melvin Wilbur's home was selected as the site for the first meeting to be held on baptism for the dead. From the journal of David Pettigrew, who also lived in Quincy, we read:

"In the spring of 1840, Brother Joseph Smith and William Law came over on our side of the river on the Sabbath Day and held a meeting and taught us many things of the work we had to do for our dead. After the meeting they went with us to the river and a number of the Elders, by his direction, commenced baptizing their brethren for their dead. In a history written by one of Melvin's granddaughters (her name unknown) we read: "Melvin was chosen as one of the first two Elders to be baptized for the dead. They were baptized in the Mississippi River by the Prophet. Melvin and his wife were baptized many times for the dead. They were the only members of their family's to join the Church."

Alexander L. Baugh, in an article, "Baptism for the Dead Outside Temples," states: *Historical sources reveal that baptisms for the dead were indeed performed by Latter-day Saints living in areas other than Nauvoo. For example, on 9 November 1840, a meeting was held at the home of*

***Melvin Wilbur** in Quincy in Adams County, Illinois. Somewhere near the Wilbur property,*

perhaps in the Mississippi River, Ezra T. Benson was baptized for his deceased brother John Benson.

Baptism for the dead Quincy Nov: 9. 1840. Meeting was held at Quincy in the home of Melvin Wilbur. Benson was baptized for his deceased Brother John Benson - in Quincy. Branch Record & Baptism in the Record Book by said branch about Baptism for the dead Quincy Nov: 15th Two Elders appointed to baptize for the dead of M. H. & Melvin Wilbur

Mrs. Newman died Thursd 10th Sept: 1840. Husband of John Heyman
John Heyman was baptized for her son Cyrus Livingston Heyman, Sund. Sept: 12 1840
by Harvey Christy in the Mississippi river Nauvoo. Vienna Jaques rode
2 11 ... the ...
Nauvoo Baptisms for the Dead, front of Book A

When the Apostles left Nauvoo to go to England on missions so sick they could scarcely hold their heads up to wave goodbye to their families, Melvin and Eunice had an opportunity to be of service to them in Quincy. Here is portions of an account written by Heber C. Kimball:

Another brother volunteered there, and the same day took us on our way as far as Quincy which is fifty miles from Commerce [Nauvoo]. When we arrived at Quincy in consequence of the fatigues of the journey I was taken with the chill fever again at the sisters Pitkin's. After being there one or two days, I then went to Doctor Staley's and remained under the care of Sister Staley and her daughter until the 25th, my pain and afflictions were very severe. I received great kindness from them and also from the Sisters Pitkin; and I pray that the Lord may abundantly bless them, and administer comfort and blessings to them in every time of need.

Elder Young's health was very poor in deed; he was not able to sit up but a little while at a time. While we were at Quincy, Brothers George A. Smith, Theodore Turley, and Reuben Hedlock overtook us, they being also considerably sick and very feeble. The saints at Quincy were kind and administered to our wants and assisted us on our journey.

*My sorrow was great on leaving Quincy as well as on leaving Commerce, to see so many of our brethren sick and dying in consequence of being driven and being exposed to hunger and cold. Next day Brother Rich took us and carried us to **Brother Wilber's**. While on the road the chills came upon me again, and I suffered much pain and fatigue. When we got there [to the Wilburs] we found Brother Turley sick in bed, and the other brethren not much better. Next day **Brother Wilber** took us on our journey about twenty five miles to the place where President Marks resided, at the town of Pittsfield. The other*

*brethren left us at **Brother Wilber's** and took another road. **May the Lord bless and preserve those who did minister to our necessities, for the time will come when they shall be rewarded for their deeds of kindness.***

On 14 June 1841, Melvin and Eunice moved with their little family to Nauvoo where Melvin was a shoemaker. They are on the records of members of the Nauvoo 4th ward. Melvin, Eunice and family are mentioned on the Continuing Church Record at Nauvoo, Illinois.

In the fall of 1841, another child was born to Melvin and Eunice. The baby's name was Alma. This baby lived only one year. He/She died the weekend of 28 Oct 1842 in Nauvoo, Illinois. (Some records claim this Alma was a girl while the second Alma was a son. I have found no proof.) A second child named Alma B. was born 23 Oct 1832. This is the same week as the first little Alma died according to the Wasp Newspaper article. "The Wasp" 29 Oct 1842 lists:

Alma Wilbur died wk end 28 Oct 1842 age 1 yr.

Early Church Information Index 820:147

One may wonder if there was a mistake on the birth of Alma B. However, the Blockhouse Branch records when the Wilburs were at Winter Quarters names Alma B. and gives his date of birth as 23 Oct 1842. There is also an indication that he died in 1849. [Name transcribed from the Iowa Branches Members Index 1839 - 1859, Volumes 1 & 2 by Ronald G. Watt. Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 1991. <http://earlylds.com/getperson.php?personID=149346&tree=Earlylds>]

Melvin WILBUR helped build the Nauvoo Temple with "Tithing Labor." Eunice sewed and cooked for the temple workers. Her tender heart and service-oriented nature prompted her to join with the other women of Nauvoo in the formation of a Society for the relief of the poor and suffering. Eunice Wilber was voted into membership of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society on 24 Mar 1842, one week following its organization. Her daughter, Eliza Jane was voted into membership on 19 May 1842. [Mormon Historical Studies Fall 2002 Vol 3. No. 2]

Melvin officiated often in the Nauvoo Temple, asking prayers and assisting others. As soon as the baptismal font in the temple was completed, the Saints began performing baptismal ordinances in the temple for their dead relatives and friends. At the time of these early baptisms, men could be baptized for women and women for men.

Those for whom Melvin was baptized by proxy for in the Nauvoo Temple:

Melvin:

Robert Keith	great grandson (proxy's relationship to deceased)
Tabitha Keith	great grandson
... Leach	grandmother (deceased's relationship to proxy)
Welthy Leach	nephew
Stetson Leach	nephew
Sarah Leach	nephew
Lemuel Wilbur	son
Lemuel Wilbur	grandson
Sarah Wilbur	grandson

Jeremiah Wilbur	nephew
Lydia Wilber	great grandson

Those for whom Eunice was baptized by proxy for in Nauvoo Temple Records:

Eunice Wilbur:

Stephen King	granddaughter (proxy's relationship to deceased)
Margaret King	granddaughter
Cynthia King	cousin
Susanna Lake	grandmother (deceased's relationship to proxy)
S...	Aunt
Tabson, Ruth	Aunt (Taber?)
Taber, Margaret	cousin
Taber, Mary	cousin
Taber, William	cousin

[Nauvoo Temple Book A]

In 1843, Melvin was called as a special missionary to Bond County, Illinois. His companion was M.F. Bartlett. From the journal of Joseph Smith, we read:

3 Jul. I [Joseph Smith] directed the Twelve Apostles to call a special conference to choose elders to go into the different counties of Illinois to preach the gospel and disabuse the public mind with regard to my arrest.

Among Melvin's converts was Eunice's youngest sister, Ruth K. Dennis, born January 1821, North Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Ruth joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1844 in Illinois, being baptized by Melvin Wilber. She received her patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith, Sr. When the Mormon's moved west, Ruth made at least one trip to Utah in hopes of finding a husband -- but she never married. She went back to Illinois where she associated with the Reorganized Church for many years. She died an elderly woman (97 years) and was cared for by her niece, Sarah Hall. She was a contributor to the Reorganized Church publication, Zion's Hope, under the pen name of "Aunt Ruth." Ruth's obituary read in part:

She was the youngest and last of a family of thirteen children, being, at the time of her death, over ninety seven years old. She was a member of the Latter Day Saints Church, and in her earlier days a very active and loyal member.

In 1844, when The Prophet Joseph Smith was running for President of the United States, Melvin was called on a mission to Rhode Island to gain support for the Prophet's campaign. The missionaries were to "preach the truth in righteousness and present before the people General Smith's views of the powers and policy of the general government and seek diligently to get up electors who would select him for the presidency." The names of the Elders who are appointed to the several states, together with their appointments were published: Rhode Island – William Seabury, 1st, Melvin WILBUR, Thomas McTaggart. The Convention of the State of Illinois met and chose Joseph Smith as their candidate for President of the United States to be presented at

the Baltimore Convention scheduled for 13 July 1844. It was claimed he was elected because of the many Mormons in Hancock county; thus fueled the desire of many to be rid of Joseph Smith. Melvin was on the campaign trail when he received word that the Prophet Joseph Smith had been murdered in the Carthage Jail.

Returning to Nauvoo and the profession of shoemaker, Melvin devoted much time and energy to completing the Nauvoo Temple. He received another patriarchal blessing on 19 May 1845 by Patriarch John Smith.

On 31 Dec 1845, Melvin and Eunice went to the Nauvoo Temple and received their endowments. They were sealed in marriage for eternity on 16 Jan 1846. Melvin officiated in the temple and offered prayers for many temple sessions.

On the 24 May 1846 at Nauvoo, another son, Amos, was born. He was a healthy child and lived in spite of the hard times that immediately followed his birth. The mobs became increasingly violent in Nauvoo and the Saints were forced to leave their home again.

Melvin did not leave with the earliest groups, but stayed in Nauvoo as long as possible to serve in the temple, helping others obtain their endowments. The day came, however, when no one was safe and even the temple was burned by mobs.

A family tells of purchasing a home from Mr. Wilbur, who is probably our Melvin:

My husband bought a house; it was a small frame house on Main and Cutler Streets. I was well pleased with it, as it was in a pleasant neighborhood where we could see the great Mississippi with its numerous steamboats going up and down. Besides, we had a fine view of the temple. We could distinctly see the men at work and hear the sound of their hammers while cutting the stones. Mr. Wilbur, the man we bought the place from, had a nice garden growing, and we got half of it with the place for \$220. There were several peach trees.

Jonathan Crosby's journal said:

“In November 1846, we found brother Melvin Wilbur and family in Bonaparte [Van Buren County, Iowa— only two counties away from Hancock Co., IL]. With them we stayed a week or more. We had two cows that we brought with us from Nauvoo, only one of which gave milk, and the other being quite fat, I killed her and sold some of the beef for bread stuff so we became pretty well supplied with eatables.”

We next find the WILBUR family in Council Bluffs, Pottawattamie, Iowa. His church records were in the Blockhouse Branch of the Winter Quarter's project. On 29 Aug 1847, another son, Elisha J. Wilbur was born at Council Bluffs.

According to family tradition, and history of his son, Elisha, Melvin was one of the 500 men to answer his country's call for a Mormon Battalion to march from Iowa to California. [Son, Elisha always claimed his father was in the Mormon Battalion, although we cannot verify his name on any company roster. It is my personal feeling that if he did leave with the Battalion initially, Melvin was among those who were sent back on sick detachment because he is soon in Iowa again, long before most of the battalion members were there.]

If Melvin was, even for a short time, gone with the Mormon Battalion, once again Eunice was left alone with her little family while her husband may have started out to serve in this Army. Such was the price a woman must pay for a faithful husband who is committed to following the prophet. We can only imagine the hardships she faced as no record of her experiences survived. Possibly after spending time in a Sick Detachment at Pueblo, Colorado, Melvin returned to Pottawattamie County, Iowa and worked again as a shoemaker to earn money to take his family to Zion.

At Winter Quarters, Melvin Wilbur was married for time only to a woman named Melinda Eddy who was born 10 Sep 1807 at Eton, Madison, New York. Melinda was sealed for eternity to Laertes Wm. Newell who was born Aug 5, 1900 at Oneida, NY. This marriage was performed 1 Jan 1848 at 12:45 noon with witnesses Willard Richards and Joseph Young. I have found no record of Melinda other than this marriage and do not know what became of her. She was not with the family in 1850. Other women Melvin was sealed to – most likely by proxy – as he never lived with any of them, were: Sarah Leech, Margaret Taber, Mary Taber, Cynthia King, Eunice Townsend, Belinda Eddy, and Margaret McBlane. [Most of these women can be found on the list of those for whom Melvin and Eunice were baptized for the dead.]

On the 1850 Pottawattamie County, Iowa Census page 160 we find:

Melvin WILBUR male age 49 shoemaker born Mass

Eunice Wilbur female age 41 born R.I.

Stephen Wilbur male 18 laborer b. R.I.

Phoebe Wilbur female 13 b. Ohio

Alma Wilbur male 4 b. Ill. * should be Amos

Elisha Wilbur male 2 b. Ill.

Their daughter, Eliza, had married in Nauvoo in 1844 to Levi Stringham. The above census does not list Amos, who would have been 4 years old in 1850. Amos lived to go to Salt Lake Valley where he died in 1864. [The following children died previous to this time: Oliver 1838; Melvin L. 1839; William D. bef 1841; Alma 1842 – Alma (a female) was listed as a family member when membership records were transferred from Quincy to Nauvoo on 14 Jun 1841. This child is listed in a Nauvoo newspaper as having died during the week ending 28 Oct 1842. Nauvoo death records lists this Alma as a female. The Blockhouse (Pottawattamie, Iowa) Ward Records lists Alma B. Walker as having been born 23 Oct 1842 and a member from 1846-1849. This Alma is listed as a male. Did Alma B. die in 1849? Should the four-year-old child on the census have been Amos? There is either a mistake in the Blockhouse ward records or on the information recorded on census or Nauvoo newspaper record. Alma is not listed as one of the children to come west with his father in 1852.]

Melvin and Eunice Wilbur were among the many Saints who settled for a time in Pottawattamie County, Iowa to assist others who would be traveling westward. They participated in some very important events of Church History including the sustaining of Brigham Young as the second

prophet of this dispensation: Closing Down Kanesville and Iowa LDS Settlements (1852) Ensign Article of August 2002 gives following information. These are a few excerpts: "Pushing on to Zion: Kanesville, Iowa" by William G. Hartley

A log tabernacle served as Kanesville's main meetinghouse. A Seventies Jubilee (Melvin was a member of the Seventy) was held there on 16–21 January 1848. Latter-day Saints from both sides of the river enjoyed a six-day gathering for worshiping, preaching, celebrating, and dancing. Mornings featured talks by General Authorities; in the afternoons and evenings, dancing was interspersed with singing, band numbers, and other amusements. During the Jubilee, Saints signed two petitions. One urged the Iowa legislature to make the Pottawattamie tract a county, which happened later that year. The other encouraged the federal government to establish a post office in the area, which it did in March 1848, with the name of Kane.

Elections, balls, socials, school graduations, tithing collection, and meetings of the Blockhouse Branch [of which the Wilbur family belonged] and the Pottawattamie Stake High Council were held regularly in the log tabernacle.

Earlier, on 5 December, nine of the Twelve Apostles met at Elder Hyde's home. Elder Hyde later reported:

"The voice of God came from on high, and spake to the Council [saying] "Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom." He affirmed: "This was the voice of the Almighty unto us." I am one that was present and did hear and feel the voice from heaven, and we were filled with the power of God."

It was moved and approved that President Brigham Young be sustained as President of the Church. They approved his choice of counselors: Elders Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards. Outside, people came to the Hydies' door and knocked, worried because they felt houses shake and the ground tremble and thought there had been an earthquake. It was the Lord speaking to His leaders, Elder Hyde assured them.

The First Presidency reorganization received a sustaining vote at the Church's next annual conference held at Kanesville on 8 April 1848. At that point, some 10,000 Saints were in the Kanesville region compared to only 5,000 in Utah. Similar sustaining votes took place that August in England and in October in Salt Lake City.

In April 1852, six years after Thomas L. Kane described the encampment that became Kanesville, the following description of the same area appeared in the local newspaper:

"It is a fine, flourishing town, and contains about 300 houses; 16 mercantile establishments; 2 drug stores; 2 printing offices; 5 hotels; 4 groceries; 2 jewelers shops; 1 harness maker; 8 wagon shops; 2 tinsmiths; 2 livery stables; 2 cabinet shops; 5 boot and shoe makers [Melvin was a shoemaker]; 2 daguerrean rooms; 5 practical physicians; 9 attorneys at law; 1 gunsmith; 1 cooper; several ministers of different denominations; 3

barber shops; 4 bakeries; 1 mill; 7 blacksmith shops; and about 1,000 to 1,500 inhabitants.”

Kanesville had become a thriving community; thus many Saints were getting “too” comfortable. But Kanesville and its surrounding Latter-day Saint settlements were never meant to be permanent. They were only to serve as stopover and recruitment places. “Abandonment, not establishment, was the watchword.” So, in an epistle dated 21 September 1851, the First Presidency instructed “all the Saints in Pottawattamie” to come to Utah the next season “and fail not. What are you waiting for? Have you any good excuse for not coming? No! We wish you to evacuate Pottawattamie, and the States, and next fall be with us.” Those who make the sacrifice “shall be blessed.”

In response, during 1852 the Saints pulled out of Kanesville and western Iowa and formed into a massive stream of emigrants flowing to Utah.

Kanesville’s primary reason for being was to help Saints get to Utah. From 1848 to 1852 an estimated 46 Latter-day Saint wagon trains left, involving about 2,900 wagons and more than 25,000 Latter-day Saints. The Pottawattamie High Council vowed to “spare no pains to further, by all available means in their power, the emigration to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.”

Because cholera was so rampant that year—reports said 60 Saints had died from it while crossing Nebraska—the branches in Pottawattamie County observed 14 July as a day of fasting and prayer. With so many Saints living in the Kanesville vicinity or passing through for six years, it is probable that the burial ground on a hill north of the Council Bluffs business district contains more Latter-day Saint graves than does the Winter Quarters cemetery across the river. In today’s Fairview Cemetery, the high east end is where the Latter-day Saint graves were. No markers from the Kanesville period have survived. Hundreds of Saints were buried there. [end of Ensign article]

Eunice gave birth to another baby boy about June 1851. He was named Joseph D. Wilbur. She may have died in childbirth or shortly thereafter. Elisha Wilbur, who was nearly four at the time, claimed in a newspaper interview at the age of 93, that he remembers his mother became ill supposedly through some kind of poisoning and died as did her youngest **child** and they were buried together in a homemade coffin.

A descendant of Elisha’s sent me the following information:

Last week, in visiting with one of my mother's older cousins, I heard a new story. Ruth Darrington is the daughter of Elisha's youngest daughter, Grace. In Elisha's later years, he lived with his daughter Pearl, but came to dinner with Grace's family every Sunday. Ruth was born about 1925, and Elisha died in 1942, so she's old enough to have clear memories of her grandfather. Anyway, Ruth said that Elisha often recounted the story of his mother's death by poisoning. Apparently, Melvin (as well as many other church members) had a hard time getting enough food to feed his family. He approached a non-

member woman, asking for food, and she gave him a jar of applesauce. Since Eunice was nursing a baby, he gave the applesauce to her, and tried to find other food for the older children. The next morning, Eunice and the baby were both dead, and traces of Paris Green (a poison) were found in the applesauce jar. Ruth said that Elisha recounted how horrible it was to watch the clods of dirt fall on his mother and **baby sister** - there was no money for a coffin. With both versions of Eunice's death being recounted by Elisha, it's hard to know whether she died in childbirth or of poisoning... [Jamie S. Kay ; 2009]

Jamie's story opens up new questions: There was time between Elisha's birth [Aug 1847] and that of Joseph D. [Jun 1851] for another baby to have been born. This could have been the "baby sister" mentioned by Elisha in the above story. The only other known "missing" child is Alma B. who possibly died in 1849. [This child was listed as a member of Blockhouse Branch from 1846-1849.]

Although the 1850 census lists Alma as age 4, I think it should have been Amos who was the correct age (4) but is not listed on the census.

It makes perfect sense for a mother to give a 2-year old hungry little girl some of her applesauce. A 2-year old girl would qualify as Elisha's "baby" sister and also a "youngest child" – although not the newborn baby boy.

It has long been thought Eunice and her babe died during childbirth. I have been able to prove the little boy lived and was named Joseph D. Wilbur. His age at death gives us an approximate date of death for Eunice Wilbur also. At the very least, we know she did not die before Joseph D. was born –approximately June 1851.

Eunice Wilbur lies in an unmarked grave with a child in her arms as they sleep the slumber of death while her family goes on – it is to Zion they wend their way – without her tender loving care at the end of each day. Young Elisha carried in his little mind the horror of dirt clods being thrown onto his mother and "baby sister." Whether she died of childbirth or of needless and cruel poisoning, she was still gone. With heavy heart, yet firm in the faith, Melvin continued to follow the prophet of the Lord and brought his family westward!

Many descendants of this brave couple long to know the real story and have felt the faith and fortitude of these pioneers! I, personally, have felt the call to share all I can learn about this family. I am so grateful for all those who have kept records, journals, and searched the conversion story of my ancestors which have made my task easier. Following is a poem I wrote many years ago about Melvin and Eunice. –Cheryl Harmon Bills–3rd great granddaughter.

MELVIN & EUNICE WILBUR

by Cheryl Harmon Bills

In eighteen hundred and thirty-two
Melvin Wilbur was baptized and his wife was, too.
Mobs of family and friends chased them out
Of their Rhode Island home--in the rain, no doubt.
They made their way to Kirtland and then
Mobs chased them from their homes again.
To Missouri they went with humble faith
Mobs came again to this lowly place.
A babe in arms and a boy quite young
Died from exposure when these deeds were done.
In Quincy they settled and made a new home.
It was here that Joseph, the Prophet, did come
To preach a new doctrine of Baptism for the dead
Melvin was one of the first baptized it is said.
They moved to Nauvoo near the Prophet so dear
Planted peach trees and gardens; they so loved it here.
But the mobs weren't content to leave them alone
The Wilburs were chased again from their home.
To Winter Quarters they went and then
Melvin left with the battalion of mighty men.
Leaving Eunice and children in a wagon box
Some chickens, a cow, and a lame old ox.
When Melvin returned they continued to stay
Making shoes for funds to be on their way.
The wagon was set on its wheels again
Taking their home with them, this time, they began
Westward and onward over hill and plain
The shoemaker was going to Zion again!
Eunice gave birth on very cold night
And never again did she feel quite right.
Who cared for her babe, it is not known
For Eunice Wilbur was then called Home.
Home to her Father in Heaven above.
Where no mobs can hurt or push and shove.
She gave all she had and then gave even more
Now she lies buried where animals roar.
Grandmother Wilbur, 'twas not in vain
You gave up your life and fortune and came
Far from your loved ones and hearth and home
To live in the open and wander and roam
Homeless and hungry; tired and ill
Your posterity honors you and always will.

Following the council of the leaders of the Church, and with the loss of his wife and companion for 27 years, and another dead child vivid in his mind, Melvin made final plans to take his family to Utah. Melvin is listed as joining Eli B. Kelsey's wagon train, but that trip did not happen. Along with his motherless family, he came west in 1852 in the Allen Weeks Pioneer Company. Both companies were on the trail at the same time.

Allen Weeks Pioneer Company 1852 lists the Wilbur Family as follows:

Wilbur, Melvin age 49 (widower)	Amos Wilbur, age 8
Stephen King Wilbur age 20	Elisha Wilbur, age 2
Phoebe Wilbur age 15	Joseph D. Wilbur, age 1

Following is information taken from the diary of Evan M. Greene:

1852: Aug 19 traveled about 14 miles & camped on the Bank of the river about ½ past 4 o'clock & prepared to set tire. **Bro. M[elvin]. Wilbers [Wilbur's] infant child [Joseph D. Wilbur] died.** Greene, Evan Melbourne, Diaries 1833-1852, vol. 6

Thus, the baby, Joseph D. Wilber , died August 19, 1852 – aged 14 months. To help determine where Joseph's death took place:

From the Trail Journal kept by Evan M. Greene:

Aug 16 traveled about 17 miles[.] camped on the **east of Cobble Hills:**

17 Traveled about 20 miles[.] camped on the **east end of the swamp west of Sandy Bluff**

18 About 10 o'clock Hannah How in attempting to get out of Bro Sanders wagon was run over and badly hurt. this morning about 5 ocl. some Indians came into our camp the first we have seen since we left the **[Elk] Horn** they were souix [Sioux] about 200 men women & children with their horses, dogs, loges and furniture

19 traveled about **14 miles & camped** on the **Bank of the river** about ½ past 4 o'clock & prepared to set tire. Hannah How proved not to be dangerously hurt. **Bro. M[elvin]. Wilbers [Wilbur's] infant child [Joseph D. Wilbur] died.**

Aug 20 My lame ox could not be found with the other cattle & after starting the teams I returned to hunt [.] about 2 miles below our camp grounds, Charles Warner came up and I took dinner with him. Came on found our camp about **8 miles** a head Bro. [Rufus] Fishers wagon wheel broken and the mechanics were at work on it. about 5 clock had a severe thunder storm & Bro. Clarks Bull that worked on the Cannon wagon was killed by lightning. very cool weather.

21 Started about 8 o'clock[.] all right traveled about **15 m[iles]** passed a trading company on the south side of the river

22 Started about 9 o'clock[.] it being Sunday traveled about **18 miles** this evening[.] the officers held a council & appointed Jessie Louder & Samuel Brown a committee **to go a head to Laramie** to have [get] items

Aug. 23 The committee did not go. my health very poor, had to let the girls drive team.

24 I was very sick with an attack of the liver, could not set up took medicine. Alonso Hay [Nay] drove my team. **camped about 3 miles below Ft. Laramie.** Bro Little went up to the Ft. with his carriage and staid all night.

Melvin had 3 oxen and a cow to pull their wagon across the plains. His oldest son, Stephen, belonged to the Nauvoo Band and helped keep the Saints in good spirits as they traveled. Phebe was 15 years old and took care of her younger brothers on the long journey.

Following are accounts of fellow travelers that share some of the things the Wilbur family would also have experienced:

When the appointed time came for the journey across the plains we and the wagons were taken across the Missouri river on the ferries, but the animals had to swim across as there were no ferries for them and there was no other way.

The women generally rode in the wagons and always slept in the wagons. Personally, I thought they were the most remarkable vehicles I had ever seen. Upon nearing the Rocky mountains we all had to walk and gather buffalo chips along the way for the camp fires.

One of the singular incidents that happened enroute was the occasion of a stampede of a herd of buffalo which came directly toward our wagon train. The stampede ran, providentially, just in front of the wagon train and it appeared almost a cyclone of dust. This caused a great commotion and almost a stampede among the horses and oxen of the train. The few rifles available were used and fortunately enough for the emigrants a few buffalo fell which were prepared and this gave us extra provisions on the long journey ahead of us. Upon another occasion nearly a dozen Indians came on their horses and approached the emigrant train.

A great deal of apprehension was felt by the emigrants as they felt that an impending disaster was before them. They thought this was the first contingent of Indians that lurked in the ravines near the trail. But our daily prayers were answered and we were assured that a Heavenly Father was mindful of the needs and protection of the Saints. The Indians spread their blankets by the side of the trail and each wagon was required to give its toll of food to the Indians as it passed. When we had advanced to the Green River Station, now Green River, Wyoming, the supply of flour had been exhausted.

The fall snow commenced bringing a cold blizzard and wintry blast, all of which added to the perils of the journey. It became necessary to send a man with the best and fastest equipment on to Salt Lake City to get flour and rush back to Green River which was only sufficient to sustain the party in the train for the balance of the trip. On into the mountains we went along the already broken trail which had now been traveled by the immigrant trains for five years. We arrived at Salt Lake City, October 16, 1852.

Next we have an interview with Pioneer, Elisha Wilbur, son of Melvin and Eunice regarding their trip west: Wilbur, Elisha, [Interview], in "Utah Pioneer Biographies," 44 vols., 30:5-8. Elisha would have been 5 years old in August 1852.

10. At what place did you join the company or wagon train with which you came to Utah?
10. Council Bluffs, Iowa. Mr. Wilbur's father started west in 1846, but was delayed due to joining the Mormon Battalion. This <delayed> the trip west and in the meantime Elisha and several other children were born. During this time Elisha Wilbur's mother died in childbirth and the dead babe and its mother were buried together. Mr. Wilbur's father started to Utah again in 1852 with his 5 little motherless children. Mr. Wilbur's older sister and brothers helped the father with the younger chil[d]ren.
11. When did it leave for Utah?
11. 1852.
12. What was the place of your destination in Utah? Why did you come to Utah?
12. Salt Lake City, Utah. Came to Utah for religion.
13. When did you arrive there?
13. In October 1852.
14. Who was the leader of your company or train?
14. J.C. Little was leader of the company.
15. Method of travel (handcart, ox team, mule team, horseback, etc.)
15. Came by Ox team. Had three oxen and a cow to pull the wagon.
31. Do you recall seeing any buffalo or hunting any wild game? If so, tell about some incident.
31. Mr. Wilbur saw plenty of buffalo crossing the plains. The Indians killed the buffalo and traded the skins to the emigrants for food stuffs. His father killed antelope in Utah.
34. Tell about coming to your state in a covered wagon.
34. Coming across the plains they ate considerable dried buffalo meat. They were friendly with the Indians. When crossing at night, when they camped

on the plains they would build large camp fires and all Saints would sing and pray. One thing that impressed Mr. Wilbur, then a lad of 7, [actually only 5 years old] was the unlimited vastness of the Sun flowers, then in bloom. He thought it then and still does, one of the most beautiful sights he ever saw.

In the 1852 Index to Utah LDS Wards, we find Melvin WILBUR in the 8th ward of Salt Lake City. Their first home in Salt Lake City was adobe and a tent. They cooked on a campfire and lived the simple life of a pioneer.

Melvin (supposedly) married Ada Winchell Clements, who was born December 24, 1801 at Hebson, Washington County, New York. Melvin was only married to her to help care for her and for her to help care for his motherless children. Her husband, whom she dearly loved, was still alive but not willing to follow Brigham Young. As far as I can tell Melvin and Ada did not live together long, if at all. Ada's husband, Albert Clements, later came to Utah and they were reunited. Some claim this marriage took place on 8 Feb 1853, however, a family record of Ada's family says:

In the year, 1864, the Clements moved from Utah to Idaho and settled at Stockton, a branch of Oxford. In 1865, having discovered the "finest girl in the world," her son, Albert N., married Elizabeth Ann Boyce. Ada was persuaded that she might do more good in this world as a comfort to others and help herself over some hard places by marrying a man by the name of James Steers. After a few years he died, and later Ada married another man named Wilbur. [Actually she probably married Melvin before Steers, but did not stay with him.] He also died after a time. There were no children of either marriage and Ada wouldn't consent to either marriage in the Endowment House, which was being used temporarily while the temples were being built.

According to her history, Ada's first husband did not come back into the picture until after Melvin's death. The 1880 Census proves that there are some errors in this story. Melvin was still alive and living with Jane in 1880 and Ada and Albert are also living together at this time. Whether Melvin and Ada lived together very long or at all is unknown. Did Melvin and Ada get a divorce at some time? We do not find them on any record or census together as man and wife. Ada passed away at the age of 90 years in Oxford, Idaho.

In 1856, Melvin and his son Amos are listed on the Census of Salt Lake City near his daughter Phoebe who was married to Rufus Walker. On 21 Aug 1856, Melvin Wilbur married Jane McBlane. She had no children and none were born to this union. They enjoyed nearly 30 years of life together during the Utah pioneer period and it was Jane that Melvin's grandchildren knew as their Grandmother.

Melvin's daughter, Eliza Stringham and her family remained in Iowa when her father came west. When his son, Elisha turned 16, he went to his sister's home, claimed to be 18 years old and enlisted in the Civil War. He met President Lincoln who put his hand on Elisha's shoulder and

said he was a fine lad. Melvin's son, Stephen, settled in Utah and built the third house in the little town of Eden in Ogden Valley. Elisha would later settle there also building and operating a fine dry goods store. His daughter, Phebe, married Rufus Walker, raising a fine family. They lived in Utah and later Idaho where she died and is buried near American Falls in a small graveyard at Neeley, Idaho. At various times they lived near her brother, Stephen. Melvin's son, Amos, died in 1864 and is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Salt Lake. He was only 18 at the time of his death.

Melvin owned half a block of property north of the city and county buildings on State Street. This property he later gave to the Church, but because of the lack of legal papers, neither the Church or the Wilbur family could claim the property. As a result, it remained vacant for many years.

Melvin assisted in the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. He was also actively involved in temple work for the dead in the Logan temple when it was completed. He not only did ordinance work for his own ancestors, but he also served as witness for many others. His love for the temple is evident as we look back over his life and see his involvement with these 4 temples: Kirtland, Nauvoo, Logan and Salt Lake. Melvin did not live to see the completion of the beautiful Salt Lake Temple which took 40 years to build.

We find him in 1860 with his wife, Jane and 14 year old son, Amos. Melvin is 60 years old at this time and Jane is 51. In 1860, Melvin had a real estate wealth of \$200, and a personal wealth of \$300. The City Directory of Salt Lake in 1867 shows Melvin WILBUR, a last maker, on 4th S and 1st E. In 1869, he is listed as a lastmaker in 8th ward; on 2 E and corner of 5S in Salt Lake.

In 1870, again in Salt Lake in the 8th ward, is Melvin WILBUR age 69. His occupation is a boot and shoemaker. His wife, Jane is 61. The 1874 city directory of Salt Lake lists Melvin as a shoemaker in 8th ward on 2E between 5 and 6 S.

1880 Census Place: 9th Ward, Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah

Source: FHL Film 1255337 National Archives Film T9?1337 Page 31A

Relation	Sex	Marr	Race	Age	Birthplace
Melville WILBUR	Self	M	M	W 78	MA
Occ: Last Maker	Fa: MA	Mo: MA			
Jane WILBUR	Wife	F	M	W 72	ISLE OF JERSEY
Occ: Keeps House	Fa: IRE	Mo: IRE			

In 1884, Melvin and Jane lived at 240 N. 5th West in Salt Lake.

Melvin died 15 Nov 1885 in Salt Lake City, Utah an elderly man in his 80's. Jane McBlane Wilbur died 17 Jun 1891. They are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Salt Lake City.

The Journey of an 1830 Book of Mormon

Gerald E. Jones

And again, verily thus saith the Lord, let my servant Orson Hyde and my servant Samuel H. Smith take their journey into the eastern countries, and proclaim the things which I have commanded them; and inasmuch as they are faithful, lo, I will be with them even unto the end. (Doctrine and Covenants 75:13)

On 1 February 1832, one week after the Prophet Joseph Smith received the foregoing revelation at a conference in Amherst, Ohio, Elders Hyde and Smith left on their mission to the eastern states. In their first day's journey they traveled from Kirtland to Painesville, Ohio, where they "visited some of the Brethren and tarried over night with them."¹

The mission of Hyde and Smith would last 11 months and take them from Maine to Rhode Island. After laboring more than 5 months, the missionaries baptized their first convert, Melvin Wilbur, on 18 July 1832 in Providence, Rhode Island. They gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon. I now own it.

Like many collectors, I have seen my appreciation of this rare, well-traveled book grow as I have explored its ownership history and travels and have contemplated how many lives it has touched and continues to touch. The book is a stirring reminder of the epochal early days of the restoration. Handling it—gently rubbing its smooth leather cover, thumbing through its discolored pages, feeling its weight, and perhaps holding it to the breast—is to touch history in an indelible, transforming way. While the book's full history remains obscure, what is known in general outline—the book's provenance and use, primarily in 1832, as a missionary tool—is enough to transport one on a delightful journey through time.

Seeking a Perfect Match

I have always liked old books, and for many years old Latter-day Saint books have held a special place among my interests. Shortly after arriving in Berkeley in 1971, I took up my usual habit of haunting used-book stores. In a store that no longer exists, I spotted an intriguing book on a shelf behind the counter. On closer inspection, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was a Bible published by the American Bible Society in New York City in 1830. I knew what an 1830 Book of Mormon looked like, and this particular Bible was a match in both size and appearance. I bought the Bible and hoped to complement it one day with a first-edition Book of Mormon. A decade later I had saved enough money to seriously start looking for one.

At that time the going price for an 1830 Book of Mormon in good condition was \$5,000. After a lot of looking, I found two copies for sale at a book dealer's shop in San Francisco.

Unfortunately, as is fairly common, both copies were flawed. The labels on the spines were missing, and one copy was warped from water damage. A subsequent trip to Zion's Bookstore in Salt Lake City led me to proprietor Sam Weller's famous safe and the best copy I had seen. But this copy too had a serious defect—the spine was only partially intact, due to a diagonal cut by a sharp object. My 1830 Bible, in contrast, was in almost perfect condition, and I wanted a Book of Mormon to match it.

When I explained my desire to Mr. Weller, he said that if I returned the next day he would show me an 1830 Book of Mormon that was owned by his deceased father. When I saw the book, I was very pleased overall but disappointed that it contained handwriting. I felt, as many book lovers do, that such markings mar a book and compromise its value. Most other copies I had seen were "clean" and therefore preferable, or so I thought at the time.

The brown leather binding was plain except on the spine, where, like my Bible, a few gold lines had been stamped and a black label with the book's title printed in gold letters had been glued. The labels were not an exact match: the one on the Bible is an eighth of an inch wider. Despite the notations in Mr. Weller's Book of Mormon, its size, binding, label, and general condition matched my Bible well enough that I wanted to purchase it. (I have since come to appreciate that the notations in my 1830 Book of Mormon enhance its distinctive character and are a treasured legacy from former owners.)

As one of 5,000 copies printed by E. B. Grandin in Palmyra, New York, in 1830, my Book of Mormon was bound by a local book binder with a stock leather binding probably made by a supplier. The black title patch has two gold lines at the top and bottom, which match the five double lines on the spine. This style of binding was standard in 1830, and a number of books were bound in matching style, including my 1830 Bible.² Sometimes the leather binding on books of that era had flaws. My Book of Mormon has a circular leather patch (2 1/4 inches across) at the top of the front cover, used by the manufacturer to repair a hole in the original leather. On the back cover are two small holes apparently caused by subsequent wear.

When I purchased my 1830 Book of Mormon, Mr. Weller provided a half-leather box that looks like a leather-bound book on the outside but is hollow and opens like a book. It made an elegant protective case for my Book of Mormon, and naturally I wanted one for my Bible as well. After learning from Mr. Weller that these handsome boxes were made by a man in New York at a cost of \$100 each, I pursued the matter and purchased one, thus completing my matching set of two very collectible books of scripture.

A Book Placed in Providence

All existing copies of the 1830 Book of Mormon undoubtedly have interesting histories, but I suspect that few would match Melvin Wilbur's for travel within the United States. Printed in Palmyra, the book went to Kirtland and was then carried by Elders Hyde and Smith to Boston and from there to Providence, where it was given to Melvin Wilbur.

The Book of Mormon has always been the premier missionary tool of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The 1830 editions are doubly precious because they are artifacts from the foundational era of missionary work undertaken at the opening of this last dispensation of the gospel. Knowing that my 1830 copy accompanied missionaries as notable as the Prophet Joseph Smith's brother Samuel (the first missionary of the restored church) and Orson Hyde (later an apostle) in their labors, I regard the book with a special reverence. Its travels are in part interwoven with the missionary activities of Elders Smith and Hyde in 1832. We are fortunate to possess the daily missionary journals of both elders.

Elder Smith relates their entry into Rhode Island and the subsequent events of that day as follows:

13th. [July 1832] Left Dorchester and went on towards Providence. Traveled a part of the way and then got into the stage and rode into Providence. Stopped to the house of one Miss Hawkins. Some of the people were believing. They had heard Sister Viena tell concerning the Book. Some of them came in the same evening and we taught them.

Orson Hyde's account adds other details for the same date:

Left Mr. Cramer's for Providence, R.I.; traveled on foot 20 miles, and then got into the Stage and rode into Providence 20 miles further. Called on a Mr. Love; found his wife believing so we found friends and the Lord opened the way before us.³

The missionaries held meetings during the evenings of 14-16 July. Elder Hyde alone records the difficulties with a rabble on the last night:

They were of the baser sort, but the Lord enabled me to speak the work with boldness and confidence, and I told them about it; and as soon as meeting was out they set up a cry and uproar, and they were determined to tar and feather us. But as kind heaven would have it one man, a friend, heard the collection, and came to us and told us to be off, for mischief was devised against us. Accordingly we passed off in the crowd unmolested and they lost their prey.

Both men gave an account of the next day's events. Elder Smith recorded more names in his account, which follows.

17th. Visited some of those that were believing and we concluded to meet with a few that believed, that we might comfort one another and that we might teach them more and to know how many were ready to go forward in baptism and to conclude upon the time and place of baptism. We concluded to meet at Sister Hawkins' and we came together and the people many of them mistrusted that we were going to have a meeting at Mr. Wilber's and they gathered around the house a great multitude and many crowded into the house and Mr. Wilbur told them that we were not there and many of those that were outdoors would not believe and they threatened that they would search the house and find us and tar and feather us and there were two young women that came and told us and there was a considerable number gathered around the house where we were and declared that if we were in the house that they would have us, but the people of the house did not let them in and told them there was no meeting there and the street was full and those that saw them said they thought there was a hundred people in the road, but we kept still that we did not talk to be heard, thus were we undisturbed. None of those that were believing concluded to obey by going forward in baptism save one Mr. Wilbur concluded to go forward in baptism.

Only Elder Hyde recounted the trouble that he and Elder Smith encountered following a baptism the next morning, and only Elder Smith recorded the person's name as well as the name of another convert who was baptized later that day. Elder Hyde wrote:

July 18th, 1832: Baptized one in the morning early before the mob and people got to stirring much, but on our return from the water a part of the mob met us in the street, and one of them presented me with a paper containing 4 sheet iron plates with rings through the back in the form of a D with hieroglyphics [*sic*] marked on them with chalk. Went

about the City considerable and every eye was upon us, and many were busy laying plans to take us when it came night; and I told Samuel that we would get out of this City as soon as possible. Accordingly we left the City after baptizing one more and confirmed them at the water's edge. We left for North Providence about 5 P.M., put up with Mr. Angel, whose wife was a sister of Virena's; friendly.

Elder Smith's account fills in needed details, including the identification of Melvin Wilbur:

18th. Early the next morning he [Melvin Wilbur] came down to be baptized and we went with him away into a by place and baptized him and then we went back to Sister Hawkins. Brother Wilber went home and we ate breakfast and then went to Brother Wilber's. His wife was very much opposed or unbelieving. Found fault with him for being baptized so soon and not telling the people and his family of it, and we reasoned with her and also with others and then we went to see a man by the name of Ashton and he was not at home and we also went to see others and Brother Wilber got George Miller and went to the water. We went to Sister Hawkins and got our clothes and went to the same place where we baptized in the morning and Brother Wilber and George Miller came and met us and there we baptized George Miller and confirmed him by the laying on of hands. Brother Wilber had an infirmity for a long time and we laid our hands on him and told him that his infirmity should be healed according to his faith, having great faith that he would get entirely well and Brother Miller had a lame leg and we laid our hands upon his leg also. They accompanied us a short distance and we left them and went about five miles to Wm. Angel's, whose wife was a sister of Sister Viena Lacways.

On 20 July both elders recorded the fact that they ordained Melvin Wilbur an elder. Whether they gave him the Book of Mormon at that time or earlier is not known. Elder Hyde added that they "gave him a license to preach the Gospel" and that they "tarried all night with Virena's at Fox Point Wharf in the City." Two days later they conducted a public meeting in which the newly ordained Elder Wilbur spoke, thereby gaining Elder Hyde's approval. I would like to think that Elder Wilbur used his Book of Mormon as the text for his remarks on that occasion.

I am unaware of any journal that Melvin Wilbur may have kept, so what I have been able to piece together on his life is sketchy. Genealogical records tell us he was born on 10 August 1801 or 1802 in Bridgewater, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, the son of Lemuel Wilbur and Jane Leach. He married Eunice Dennis in 1824. Four of their eight children were born in Providence, the fourth being William, born about 1834. One database lists 14 July 1832 as Melvin's baptismal date rather than 18 July, the date recorded by the two missionaries. The Wilburs moved to Missouri, and evidently a daughter, Phoebe Eunice, was born there on 25 April 1837. Melvin filed a petition with the state for expenses incurred in his family's expulsion, which included a move from Richmond to Far West and thence to Quincy, Illinois, in November 1838. A seventh child was born to the Wilburs in Nauvoo in 1844. A member of the Nauvoo Fourth Ward, Melvin was endowed in the Nauvoo Temple on 31 December 1845. The Wilburs' last child was born in Council Bluffs in August 1849. Melvin died in Salt Lake City on 15 November 1885 at the age of 83 or 84.

New Owners, New Horizons

Melvin Wilbur probably took the book with him to Nauvoo, where it changed hands, being given

sometime to the next owner of record, Dwight Eveleth. Like Wilbur, Eveleth was a native of Rhode Island. He took the book with him to San Francisco, where it remained for more than 40 years.

Dwight Eveleth's early history is obscure. He was ordained a teacher in the Aaronic Priesthood, perhaps in 1841, and he married Sarah Sheridan in Providence, Rhode Island, on 24 December 1846. Apparently Eveleth had been a storekeeper in Nauvoo and owned two lots there for a brief period. How he obtained Melvin Wilbur's Book of Mormon is unknown. A page glued on the inside front cover of the book provides only this information:

This book was the property of Brother Dwight Eveleth who came from the East to this State [California] in the early fifties and settled in San Francisco. In 1857 when the Elders were all called home, Pres. Geo. Q. Cannon left Bro. Eveleth in charge of affairs of the Church in this State. Bro. Eveleth died in 1869 of Small pox. Sister Eveleth his wife has kept the book till now, July 28th, 1898. When, tho firm in the faith, yet surrounded by her family who are indifferent to the Gospel, and realizing that her end is near, she gave it to me. Ephraim H. Nye.

Ephraim Nye, the book's third owner, was president of the California Mission from 1896 to 1900. Born at Ashford, Kent, England, on 8 August 1845, he was baptized in 1857. He emigrated to Utah and later returned to his homeland to labor as a missionary from 1881 to 1884. July 1902 saw him as president of the Southern States Mission. He died in Columbia, South Carolina, in May 1903. Another written note in the book indicates that President Nye took the book with him to Atlanta, where the mission headquarters were.

Although the book's owners during the next few decades remain unknown, a handwritten note⁴ on the first blank page of the book offers some food for thought. The note, written in black ink by a Utah State Supreme Court justice, reads in its entirety as follows:

Who the owners of this volume have been is now a matter of conjecture. Apparently Melvin Wilbur of Rhode Island was among the early owners if not the first. Next appearance is in California as appears from the typewritten slip pasted on the front cover. F. R. Lavelle, a Scribner book man suggested that it had been owned by someone in the southern states by whom it had been given to a Mormon missionary and then brought to Utah. When I purchased it he said he was pledged not to reveal the seller; but gave me the information that it was a relative of Martin Harris, one of the "Three Witnesses." The volume bears all the evidence of a first edition and in any event is now 107 years old when I purchased it June 17, 1937.

David W. Moffat, now a Justice of the Supreme Court of Utah and residing at 286 Vine Street, Murray City, Utah.

Judge Moffat or his estate sold the book to Sam Weller's father, and the book later passed from Sam Weller to me, the current owner.

A Book to Share

It is not known how many copies of the 1830 Book of Mormon still exist. Damaged copies have been broken apart to be sold by the page and thus are scattered. Many have found their way into

libraries around the country and into display cases in temples and museums as well as in the Missionary Training Center in Provo. A few reside in private collections. The number of extant copies is estimated to be from 100 to 300. These rare books are in various stages of preservation. On many copies the title patch on the spine has been lost or damaged, the pages missing or torn, and the paper turned a brownish color (called foxing) due to chemical reactions. Some copies bear the signatures of early church leaders, greatly increasing their value.

While my 1830 Book of Mormon would be a prize commodity in the collectibles market, I see it as a book to appreciate and share rather than as a mere investment without intrinsic value. I have tried to teach others the true value of such a treasure. As an artifact of the restoration, the book is a tremendously effective visual aid for teaching virtually any topic related to the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have taken my book to institute classes and to sessions with early-morning seminary teachers. Faculty and students alike have appreciated holding and examining this relic of the restoration.

Even more meaningful to me, my children have come to appreciate the book and all it represents. I always tell those who examine the book that Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde handled it and gave it to a convert. And of course there is the possibility that even Joseph Smith may have held it. Since I purchased the book, I have been spurred to accumulate a number of first-edition copies of the Book of Mormon in foreign languages, and returned missionaries who can read those editions have enjoyed studying them. All of this has been gratifying to me as I have tried to teach others the value of our Book of Mormon heritage.

From what little I have been able to learn about the history of one 1830-edition Book of Mormon, I believe that if the journeys of other surviving copies were known in full, in many cases the tales of ownership and travel would be fascinating—and especially moving when they involved the conversion of souls.

Notes

1. Journal of Samuel Smith, Historical Department Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
2. I have obtained three other 1830 books that closely match my 1830 Book of Mormon and Bible not only in the type of binding but also in the size and placement of the lines of type on the spines. I have not seen a study of book binding (process, materials, suppliers) in America in that era. That study still awaits the work of a serious student.
3. Journal of Orson Hyde, Historical Department Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
4. The only other notations in the book are by Melvin Wilbur. On the top of the first blank page is his very legible signature and beneath it, in two lines, the words "Providence, R.I." The other notation is found at the top of page 574 (the title page for the book of Moroni), where he wrote, again in two lines, "Melvin Wilburs Book."

